

The
Landing of Ponce de Leon
A Historical Review

By Charles B. Reynolds



MOUNTAIN LAKES, N. J.

Published by the Author

1934

FOREWORD.

The visitor at the Fountain of Youth in St. Augustine is shown what he is told is the landing place of Ponce de Leon on his voyage of discovery in 1513. A bronze tablet affirms that Ponce de Leon "landed here." The tablet is authorized by a committee appointed by the city and consisting of the President of the St. Augustine Historical Society, the Editor of the St. Augustine Record, the Mayor, a member of the D.A.R., a Historian and a Tourist. Further assurance that the Discoverer landed at this spot is proffered in the booklet which is sold at the place and is a subject of consideration in the following pages.

Few who read the tablet or the booklet have opportunity to determine the historical accuracy of its statements by comparing these with the Herrera record. It is believed that the reproduction here of the Herrera text relating to the event will be welcomed by one who has not access to the original. Writers intent on fixing the landing at St. Augustine have misquoted and misrepresented the historian, to the misleading of many. Here, by the intervention of the photostat, Herrera may be read as he wrote.

C.B.R.

Mountain Lakes, N. J.



Title page of the 1601 edition of Herrera.

Monograph Fixes Ponce's Landing Spot

Dr. Carita Doggett Corse
**Author of Interesting
Historical Work.**

In her latest publication, which has just appeared, a monograph entitled "The Fountain of Youth." Dr. Carita Doggett Corse has defined the location of the landing place of Ponce de Leon.

This spot was a wooded point in the days of the conquistadors, and is now, due to time and tide, a strip of salt marsh about a mile north of Fort Marion.

A little back of this on what is still a wooded point, was the Indian village of Seloy, where Menendez, the founder of St.

Augustine, said his first mass and where the first fortification was made by the Spanish. This fortification made use of the chief house of the village. Later a blockhouse was erected here and it might be said that the oldest city in the United States had its beginning in this manner.

At the same place the ancient stone mission of Nombre de Dios was built, and the wooden fort that Sir Francis Drake burned was nearby.

The point of location of these places has long been a matter of conjecture for historians and Dr. Corse has performed a notable service in proving them.

The monograph which is amazing as a narrative and authentic as a well documented piece of research, is beautifully illustrated with numerous plates.

Dr. Corse, whose collection of old maps is one of the finest and largest in the State, has made effective use of many of her most unusual ones in illustrating the monograph.

Among her many books, historians and the reading public have been enthusiastic in their reception of the recent "Key to the Golden Islands."

From the Jacksonville, Fla., *Times-Union*, December 22, 1933.

THE LOCATION OF THE LANDING.

The work to which the *Times-Union* refers is entitled: "The Fountain of Youth. By Carita Doggett Corse, A.B., M.A., Lit.D. Author of 'Dr. Andrew Turnbull,' 'Key to the Golden Islands,' 'Florida, Empire of the Sun,' and 'Supplementary History of Florida'."

The purpose of the present paper is to examine the work with a view to determine in what measure it is the "well documented piece of research" the *Times-Union* says it is, and what importance attaches to the pronouncement that Dr. Corse has performed a notable service in proving the location of the landing place of Ponce de Leon.

The original source authority for details of the expedition of Ponce de Leon in 1513 is Antonio de Herrera's "Historia General de los Hechos de los Castellanos en las Islas i Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano." (1601), Decada I, Libro IX, Cap. X.

Herrera is presumed to have had access to the log of Ponce de Leon. He records that the discoverer landed somewhere north of latitude 30° 8', which point is approximately eighteen miles north of St. Augustine Inlet. In fixing the landing north of St. Augustine Herrera has been followed by the American historians: Washington Irving (Life of Columbus, V. 3, p. 235), George Bancroft (History of the United States, V. 1, p. 23), John Gilmary Shea (Winsor's Narrative and Critical History of America, V. 2, p. 233), John Fiske (Discovery of America, V. 2, p. 486), William Darby (History of Florida), A. J. Weise (Discovery of America, p. 223), E. McKay Avery (History of the United States, V. 1, p. 638), E. G. Bourne, (American Nation, edited by A. B. Hart, V. 3, pp. 134-35), Caroline May Brevard (History of Florida, for schools, p. 19), Herbert E. Bolton (Spanish Borderlands, p. 7).

George R. Fairbanks who long resided in St. Augustine so recorded the landing in his works on Florida and St. Augustine. (Early History of Florida p. 6, History and Antiquities of St. Augustine, p. 140, The Spaniards in Florida, p. 12, History of Florida, p. 16.)

Another Florida historian, T. Frederick Davis, bringing into his study of the Herrera account a knowledge of the coastal con-

ditions, tides and ocean currents and meteorological influences affecting navigation, derived from a long service in the Weather Bureau at Jacksonville, locates the probable landing place as being somewhere on the stretch of coast between eighteen miles north of St. Augustine Inlet and seven miles south of the mouth of the St. Johns River. (Quarterly of the Florida Historical Society, July, 1932.)

Not until the fabled youth-restoring Fountain, so appealing to the credulity of the sixteenth century, had been given material semblance and had been adapted to commercial exploitation of the credulity of the twentieth century, did the identity of the landing place become a subject of controversy. Prior to that time the record of Herrera, that the landing had been at some point north of St. Augustine, had had common acceptance, as it has today.

In Mr. Fairbanks' time no one in St. Augustine believed that Ponce de Leon had landed there. Nor for a long time afterwards was any claim advanced for this until in 1909 a tree on the Williams place was blown down in a storm.

The Williams place was a tract north of the City Gates bordering on Hospital Creek, an affluent of the bay. From 1868 to 1890 it was used by H. H. Williams, a fruit and flower culturist, who gave it the name of Paradise Grove and Rose Garden. Appurtenant to the dwelling house was a dug well dug in 1875 by Philip Gomez and Philip Capo of St. Augustine. The well was curbed with coquina, a shell-rock quarried on Anastasia Island across the bay opposite the town, and not discovered by the Spaniards until 1580, sixty-seven years after Ponce came to Florida. The well was similar to the dug wells commonly used in St. Augustine before the introduction of artesian water.

In 1900 the Williams property passed to Edward McConnell and in 1902 came into possession of Luella Day McConnell. (She is styled Mrs. Day by the St. Augustine *Evening Record*.)

In 1909 when a tree near the well was uprooted by a storm, Mrs. McConnell gave out the fantastic story that she had discovered in the hole left by the upturned roots what proved to be a cross formed of chunks of coquina, disposed 15 in the upright and 13 in the cross-beam, having been placed thus by Ponce de Leon to commemorate the year 1513 of his discovery. Further excavation disclosed beneath the cross a Spanish casque, which



The Hoax Ponce de Leon Cross at the Fountain of Youth in St. Augustine.

being examined revealed a parchment deposited by Ponce recording that he had drunk of the "fountain" (the Williams well) and charting the point where he had landed on Hospital Creek. She also identified the site of a mission chapel built by Ponce de Leon and some of the coquina building blocks still remaining to mark the site. It is pertinent to recall that wherever Ponce made his first landing he remained at the place only five days.

This story told by Mrs. McClellan of the Ponce de Leon coquina cross and its discovery by her was the origin of the myth that Ponce de Leon landed at Hospital Creek.

Her ingenious invention found immediate acceptance and endorsement in a quarter one might least suspect.

Of the discovery of the cross, which it pronounced one of "the priceless heirlooms of the nation," the *St. Augustine Evening Record* said (March 13, 1928): "On the memorable day that an old coquina cross was accidentally unearthed on the Fountain of Youth property under the regime of the late Mrs. Day, the curator of the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science hurried to the site of the excavation and made photographs of the unusual relic, and these pictures are sold to this good day by the hundreds to tourists each summer and winter." The photos labeled "Fountain of Youth, Old Cross, 1513," were sold at the Historical Society's hoax "Oldest House in the

United States" and later at the Society's Webb Memorial. The validation thus given the cross by the Society and the Society's subsequent assertions that Ponce de Leon landed on Hospital Creek have ever since been strong factors in promoting the Fountain of Youth business of Mrs. McConnell and her successors.

Mrs. McConnell moved the house away from the well and the cross, taught the story to the glib-lipped guides, stationed a man at the gate to take the admission money, and opened the park as another of St. Augustine's places of interest for visitors. The tourists came, looked, listened, exercised their muscles of swallowing and dispersed to the four quarters of the continent to tell the tale to the folks at home. The fame of the Williams well fountain has spread as did that of the fountain of Bimini, until as the *Record* tells us: "It has been estimated that, with one possible exception of Old Fort Marion, more people come to St. Augustine to see this fabled well than any other one of the numerous fascinating spots that make St. Augustine differently interesting and increasingly attractive to travellers."

The purpose of this booklet, "The Fountain of Youth", is to demonstrate that Herrera and the long line of American historians who accepted him were in error as to the landing place of Ponce de Leon, and that Mrs. McConnell was proclaiming the truth of history when she said that the discoverer had landed at the site of St. Augustine and on the bank of Hospital Creek. The booklet submits this not as conjecture or theory but as ascertained fact. Presented thus as a serious historical work the monograph merits the serious consideration here given it. The *Times-Union* describes it as a product of careful research; the references to original source-authorities will therefore be examined to test the accuracy of the citations and the reasonableness of the deductions drawn from them.

The first citation in the booklet is erroneously ascribed to Peter Martyr, known to the world for centuries as courtier, diplomat, scholar, and historian, but here described by the author as a "Catholic Bishop." She writes:

"Peter Martyr definitely states that the fountain was his [Ponce's] main objective, 'Juan Ponce de Leon, being discharged of his office (in Porto Rico) and very rich, furnished and set forth two caravels to seek the Island of Boyncia (another name for the mainland) in which the Indians affirmed to be a foun-



El Adelantado IUAN PONCE Des-
cubridor de la Florida .

From Torquemada's "Monarchia Indiana," 1615.

tain or spring whose water is of such virtue as to make old men young. But while he traveled six months with great desire among many islands to find what he sought and could find no token of any such fountain, he entered Bimini and discovered the land of Florida'."

A footnote at the end of the citation refers to Herrera, Dec. 3, Book 1, Chap. 14. This renders uncertain what part of the

quotation she credits to Peter Martyr and what part to Herrera. Neither of them is responsible for any part of it. Nowhere in the "Decades" or in the "Enchiridion" does Peter Martyr say definitely or indefinitely that the fountain was Ponce de Leon's main objective; he does not anywhere even mention the fountain in connection with Ponce de Leon. Herrera gives the search for the fountain secondary importance. In the passage referred to he simply says that Ponce discovered Florida and went looking for the fountain. In a previous chapter relating the expedition he says nothing about the fountain or the search for it, until after Ponce, having left Florida and being on the way home, sends Ortubia, one of his captains, to search for Bimini and the fountain; whereupon Herrera explains: "It is certain that Juan Ponce de Leon, besides the main design (*principal proposito*) of making new discoveries, as all the Spaniards then aspired to do, was intent upon finding out the spring of Bimini and a river in Florida, the Indians of Cuba and Hispaniola affirming that old people bathing themselves in them became young again." (Decade 1, Book 1, Chap. XII.) The passage which the author attributes to Peter Martyr or to Herrera was written by Francisco Lopez de Gomara. His statement is in several particulars inaccurate. Ponce de Leon did not enter Bimini; he never saw Bimini.

"The only authority who offers details of Ponce de Leon's voyage", writes the author very truly, "is Herrera, whose directions and landfalls are therefore closely followed in this account. It was Herrera who also supplied us with the name of the fountain which he said was called Santatan."

As will appear, Herrera's "directions and landfalls" are "closely followed" until, in order to maintain her thesis that the landing was at St. Augustine, she finds it necessary to discard him. The discovery that Herrera gives Santatan as the name of the fountain is a contribution to the history of the subject of dubious value.

Notwithstanding her acceptance of Herrera as the only historian who offers details of the voyage, in her second paragraph she relates details not found in Herrera:

"To Ponce de Leon, conqueror and governor of Porto Rico, was brought a native woman called Aleida, who had been married to a Carib warrior. She told the governor that she had often heard her husband's kinsmen talk of the wonderful fountain of

Bimini. . . . She felt sure she could guide the governor there, so often had she heard the way described, and was willing to go since her husband had deserted her and her children were enslaved."

As authority for Aleida she cites "Catholic History of Alabama and Florida. By a Member of the Order of Mercy," page 58. The rest of the passage is credited to F. A. Ober's "Juan Ponce de Leon," a book of mingled history and fiction for boys, in Harpers American Heroes series.

Consulting page 58 of the "History" we find (as the author must have found) this statement: "The Silver Spring [spring-head of the Ocklawaha river], which tradition asserts to be the Fountain of Youth, is forty feet deep and transparent to the bottom. A beautiful Carib maiden, Aleida, made its existence known to Ponce de Leon and accompanied him on his peaceful, romantic mission in search of the elixir which was to restore strength to his tottering limbs and the light of youth to his faded eyes."

Turning to Ober we find that the person brought to Ponce de Leon is not the "beautiful maiden Aleida," but "the vieja (old woman) as she was called—being a woman past the prime of life," now that she was old it mattered not where she dwelled." "Children had been born to them, but they were lost to her now, having been enslaved; her husband had long since tired of her and gone back to the cannibal islands." Her name is not given, she is only "the vieja, as she was called".

It is difficult to comprehend how reading these two strongly contrasted accounts the author could possibly confuse the Ober old woman with the beautiful maiden of the "History." More difficult still is it to account for the fact that as a researcher of history she should have failed to recognize Aleida as a myth of tradition and the old woman as a creation of fiction; and that merging the two into one, she should have accepted this composite of tradition and fiction as an actual historical personage. "With Ponce de Leon", she writes, "went Aleida, the woman who thought she could find the Fountain of Youth." And to the guidance of the fleet by this fantasy she attributes Ponce de Leon's discovery of Florida.

At the outset of the voyage the author shows her independence of Herrera. While he recorded that Ponce de Leon sailed from

San German, Porto Rico, on March 3 and reached San Salvador on March 14, she writes: "Ponce de Leon left San Germain, Porto Rico, on March 12. . . . By the 14th he was halfway through the archipelago at San Salvador." This is to say that the distance which Herrera recorded Ponce required eleven days to make she says was accomplished in two days. "Steering to the northwest as Aleida still insisted, he saw land which he thought was an island on March 27th." From this point Herrera's directions and landfalls are followed: "Three days later he altered his course WNW . . . and on the 2nd of April, sighted land and took his bearings at 30 degrees 8 minutes north. He ran along the coast, seeking for a harbor, and anchored that night in eight fathoms of water near shore." Here she leaves the ships temporarily and dismisses Herrera permanently. For latitude 30° 8' was 18 miles north of St. Augustine, and Herrera's directions "closely followed" would have taken Ponce still further north away from the St. Augustine Inlet.

Herrera having been discarded, she replaces him with Colonel H. L. Landers of the United States War Department, who is enlisted not permanently but temporarily, for his usefulness will be brief. Herrera and Colonel Landers are conflicting authorities. While Herrera said that from 30° 8' Ponce sailed WNW in a direction away from St. Augustine, Colonel Landers, arbitrarily reversing the Herrera record, held that from 30° 8' Ponce "continued thence down the coast line seeking a harbor", i. e., in a direction toward St. Augustine. (Senate Committee on Military Affairs hearing, Feb. 19, 1932.)

To appreciate the significance of the author's use of the authority of Colonel Landers we may briefly recall the abortive scheme of 1932 by which Congress, the President and the War Department were sought to be used to validate the claim that Ponce de Leon had landed at the site of the Fountain of Youth grounds in St. Augustine.

The story is too long to be told here. Suffice it to say that appropriation bills were introduced in the Senate and the House, providing that "for the purpose of commemorating the military historic events in connection with the landing of Ponce de Leon in the State of Florida the Secretary of War is authorized and directed to erect a tablet," etc. There were no "military historic events in connection with the landing of Ponce de Leon." Colonel Landers of the Army War College undertook an investi-

gation to determine the place most appropriate for the location of the tablet. This he assumed meant also the identification of the landing place. For this purpose he visited St. Augustine, where the promoters of the Fountain of Youth business showed him through the plant—the Williams well Fountain of Youth, the Luella Day McConnell Ponce de Leon coquina cross, the Ponce de Leon landing place on Hospital Creek and the anchor there lost from one of Ponce's ships. Colonel Landers was unconvinced.

After prolonged study, and having been transferred to another field, he wrote a personal letter to Senator Fletcher, regretting the enforced discontinuance of the investigation, and submitting four conclusions "for the purpose of the bill which you have succeeded in putting through the Senate and which will doubtless become a law at the next session of Congress." But the House bill failed of adoption and the whole grandiose scheme—a huge and fantastic farce audacious beyond measure—came to its end, presumably to the relief of the War Department officials concerned.

Three of the four conclusions of Colonel Landers as sent to Senator Fletcher were as follows:

- "(a) The most appropriate place to erect a tablet or monument commemorating the first landing of Ponce de Leon in the State of Florida, is at St. Augustine.
- "(b) To erect any memorial commemorating this first landing at any other place, either in Florida or Georgia, would be unwarranted.
- "(c) In my study, by the process of elimination I have discarded all other places as probable points of the first landing."

These personal conclusions were not of an official nature and had no official authority. Nevertheless the St. Augustine *Evening Record* printed them under a display head: "United States Official Probe Lands Ponce Here." And the editor commented (Aug. 19, 1932):

"The decision comes down to us as official and authentic as an opinion handed down by the Supreme Court of the United States is concerning the case in the lower courts of the land. There is no higher authority in matters historical and the pronouncement from Colonel Landers concerning

his report to the United States Army War College and made a matter of record at Washington, D. C., should put an end to desultory talk about other places in Florida having any claim whatever to the Ponce de Leon landing."

The writer of the booklet in turn makes use of the first two conclusions which may be construed as inferentially supporting her thesis that Ponce de Leon landed at St. Augustine. She says: "Colonel H. L. Landers of the Historical Section, Army War College, and for five years in charge of marking historic landmarks of America wrote: 'The most appropriate place to erect a tablet or monument commemorating the first landing of Ponce de Leon in the State of Florida, is at St. Augustine. To erect any memorial commemorating this first landing at any other place, either in Georgia or Florida, would be unwarranted.'"

Having thus cast off the authority of Herrera and invoked the auspices of Colonel Landers, she now directs her attention to the ships which had been left on the night of April 2nd anchored in 8 fathoms of water near shore, somewhere in the neighborhood of 30° 8' and proceeds to bring them into the harbor of St. Augustine. To do this she follows Colonel Landers in reversing the Herrera direction record.

"On the morning of April 3rd," she writes, "the shore was visible to Ponce de Leon in all its springtime beauty. . . . Sweet odors drifted from the green forests beyond the sand dunes. . . . Ponce de Leon must have been glad to find the entrance to St. Augustine harbor, for a northeaster was blowing, and he stayed in this shelter until the weather moderated. Within the river a very different condition prevailed from what we know today. The mouth of the inlet itself pointed north (whereas today it points south) and sand bars blocked the north and south channels. Straight ahead lay a wooded point, the most convenient landing place for Ponce. Today the sand bars are gone and all that is left of the point is a salt marsh in front of the Fountain of Youth property. These conclusions are based on a careful study of the early maps and charts and a check of what the tides and currents have done to this coast over this great period of time."

By thus bringing the ships, from their anchorage near shore north of St. Augustine, down the coast to find the inlet and safely to cross the bar, and then to hold a course between sand-bank-obstructed channels, straight ahead to the distant wooded

point where the fountain awaited them, while all the time a Florida northeaster was blowing from which Ponce was seeking shelter—by her successful accomplishment of this the author has here performed a consummate feat of seamanship that would have challenged the skill and nerve of pilot Alaminos, even though he had Aleida to show the way. His practical sailor sense would have told him to head for the open sea and safety. Under the conditions described no experienced seaman would have approached the coast or attempted to enter an unknown and uncharted harbor.

In truth this whole episode in what the *Times-Union* rightly terms an "amazing narrative"—from the morning of April 3rd, when transcending the laws of nature "sweet odors drifted from the green forests behind the sand dunes" in the teeth of the northeaster out to the ships off shore, until "the priests of the expedition offered the prayer which Columbus had said"—this entire story is a figment of a nautically untutored imagination, and an affront to the intelligence of the reader.

But at this supremely crucial point of the thesis that Ponce de Leon landed at the site of St. Augustine, imagination has no proper place. Here where if anywhere this "well documented piece of research" should be fortified by evidence to sustain it, there is produced absolutely none. In place of recorded history is substituted a story of her own, a fancy sketch having in it not a word of demonstrable historical truth. Thus the thesis fails completely. Having no foundation of fact, fiction does not make it true.

"A bronze marker recording the landing of Ponce de Leon", continues the booklet, "stands on the Fountain of Youth property." The legend on the marker reads:

"On March third, A. D. 1513, Don Juan Ponce de Leon left Porto Rico. On Easter Sunday, March 27th he sighted this land and named it Florida. On April 3rd, 1513, he landed here and took possession in the name of God and of Their Catholic Majesties Ferdinand and Isabella of Castile and Aragon, Spain. [Isabella had been dead nine years.]

"This tablet authorized by the following committee appointed by the City of St. Augustine, July 2nd, 1930: Harold Colee, Prest. St. Augustine Historical Society; Col. Herbert Felkel, Ed. St. Augustine Record; C. Morton

Matting, M. D., Tourist; Nina Hawkins, D. A. R.; Robert Ranson, Historian; Geo. Bassett, Jr., Mayor."

By maneuvering the caravals of Ponce de Leon into the harbor of St. Augustine, and by attesting as her citation of it does attest the historical truthfulness of the legend of the tablet in the Fountain of Youth grounds proclaiming: "he landed here", Dr. Corse dismisses, repudiates and flouts her short-time authority, Colonel Landers. For in the letter to Senator Fletcher, Colonel Landers had given as his final conclusion:

"(d) The wording on the memorial which may be erected by authority of Congress, and placed at St. Augustine by authority of the Historical Section, Army War College, should not state with absolute finality that St. Augustine was the first landing place."

But "that St. Augustine was the first landing place" is precisely what the tablet does "state with absolute finality" and what the monograph was designed to prove should be stated with absolute finality. The readers of the St. Augustine *Evening Record* were deceived when this fourth conclusion was withheld from them. Readers of the booklet "The Fountain of Youth" are misled in like manner by the withholding of it.

"After Ponce de Leon had taken possession of the new land in the name of his King," our author continues, "the priests of the expedition offered the prayer which Columbus had said at his first landing." As the authority for this statement reference is made to Lowery's "Spanish Settlements in the Present Limits of the U. S., 1513-1562." Consulting the "Settlements" we discover this to be another instance of an authority cited to prove a statement but actually disproving it. Lowery wrote (page 139): "On some day between the 2nd and 8th of April, Ponce de Leon went ashore to get an interpreter and take possession. . . . The spot where he anchored and landed, says Dr. Shea, was somewhere in the neighborhood of the mouth of the St. John's River. Of the attendant ceremony, there is no record. There could have been no saying of mass, for no priest was with the party. Perhaps, on landing, Ponce offered the simple prayer said to have been used by Columbus, and from whose lips he may have learned it."

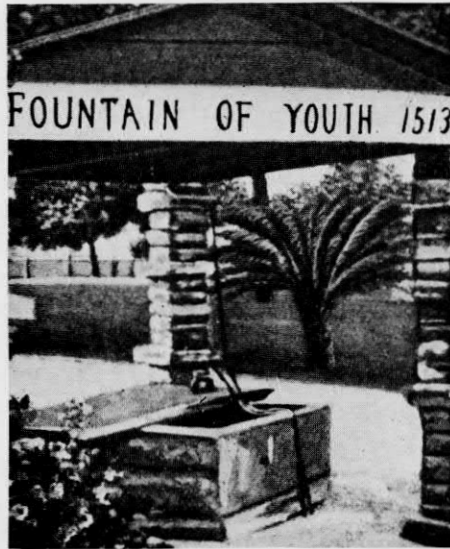
The *Times-Union* assertions, that the "Monograph fixes Ponce's landing place," and that Dr. Corse "has defined the location of the landing place of Ponce de Leon," are not borne out by the fact. This defining of the location of the landing is only the latest of a series of similar definings of the location, all by the same method of perverting the Herrera record and manipulating it to arrive at a predetermined landing spot, namely, in St. Augustine, on the bank of Hospital Creek, in the Fountain of Youth grounds. Preceding the Monograph finding was that of the Mayor's Fact Finding Commission recorded on the tablet. Before that was the dictum of the official Historian of the St. Augustine Historical Society broadcast over the radio and incorporated in a document by the St. Augustine Historical Society and signed by her. (St. Augustine *Evening Record*, Sept. 2, 1930.) Prior to these the location of the landing had been defined by Luella Day McConnell, who presumably had never heard of Herrera, but who advanced as her authority Ponce de Leon himself and his parchment record of 1513—the original parchment foundation (and the only foundation) upon which has been erected the entire structure of St. Augustine's Ponce de Leon's landing place hoax for tourists.

THE ST. AUGUSTINE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH.

We come now to the author's treatment of the Fountain of Youth in St. Augustine. For an intelligent appreciation of this it is essential that we should keep in mind our knowledge of just what this so-called "Fountain of Youth" actually is. As has been told in preceding pages it is the Williams household well, a dug well lined with coquina rock.

In a magazine article of December, 1921, the present writer said: "The well was dug about 1875 by Philip Capo and Philip Gomez, as recalled by persons now living in St. Augustine."

That the well was built about the year 1875 by Philip Gomez with Philip Capo and Gabriel Gomez (son of Philip Gomez) as assistants, is now stated on the authority of Mr. Bartolo Genovar (son-in-law of Philip Gomez), Mrs. Theo. Pomar (daughter of Philip Capo) and Mr. Christopher Pomar, all of whom are now (June, 1934) living in St. Augustine; and Mr. Gabriel Gomez now living in New Smyrna. Mr. Christopher Pomar recalls that as a boy he watched the building of the well, and fixes the date as "approximately the time Mr. Reynolds has



The Williams Well as in Mrs. McConnell's time.

in mind," 1875; also that he was living on adjoining property when Mrs. McConnell first began to exploit the well as the Fountain of Youth; and saw the house moved from near the well in order that the place might be arranged as desired.

The testimony of these witnesses is incontrovertible. It establishes the origin of the Williams well as a well. The well has been a well from the beginning; its nature was not changed by the fakery of Mrs. McConnell, nor by the showman's device of camouflaging it in an endeavor to make it look like a spring. It being a well, to speak or to write of it as a spring is to violate the truth and to deceive.

The front cover of the booklet bears a sub-title which reads: "The Fountain of Youth St. Augustine Florida 1513."

This means that the "Fountain of Youth" at St. Augustine, which is now shown as a "spring", was here in 1513. The author must believe this, otherwise she would not have made the assertion as the first eight words of her history.

After the account of the saying of the prayer of Columbus by the priests who were not present, follows a paragraph in which an abrupt transition is made from the year 1513 to our own times:

"During the five days while the expedition stayed here, it is reasonable to assume that Ponce de Leon did what his contemporaries said he did—namely sample the springs in the immediate vicinity for magic properties. Says G. T. Rude, Chief of the Division of Tides and Currents, U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, 'The Fountain of Youth, a spring in the city of St. Augustine, recorded as a landmark in the old Spanish grant, is still preserved as one of the numerous and varied attractions for visitors.' In the U. S. Geological Survey the spring in the Fountain of Youth Park is listed and an analysis of its water is given. The spring is unique in this locality, because it is without the odor of sulphur."

The plain implication here is that Commander Rude was writing of the Williams well Fountain of Youth, which the author says is a "spring unique because without the odor of sulphur"; otherwise there would have been no pertinence in quoting him. A footnote refers to the Geographical Society of Philadelphia Bulletin, July, 1925. Consulting the Bulletin we find that what Commander Rude wrote was this: "The Fountain of Youth, a spring in the city of St. Augustine, recorded in the old Spanish grant, is still preserved as one of the numerous and varied attractions for visitors. This spring, like many of the Florida springs, has a strong odor of sulphur."

The author of the booklet has deodorized the quotation perhaps to make it more agreeable to the senses and the better to serve her purpose. The citation has been sweetened, but the Rude spring retains its strong odor of sulphur.

"You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still."

In Commander Rude's paper are indications that it related to a period earlier than the time of publication (1925). He commented on the number of sulphur springs in the vicinity of the city. Perhaps among them he had in mind the Whitney spring beyond the San Sebastian river, west of St. Augustine, where about the year 1870 John F. Whitney promoted a real estate development known as Ravenswood. Running through the property was a small stream, which at one point Mr. Whitney deepened to form a pool inclosed within a coquina curbing, which he advertised as "Sulphur Springs." Later he named it "Ponce de Leon Spring," and it came to be known as the "Foun-

tain of Youth." In 1881 W. W. Dewhurst wrote of it in his "History of St. Augustine", page 175: "Mr. Williams and Mr. Hildreth, north of the city, have attractive places which are much visited by tourists. There is an interesting drive to a suburb west of the city called Ravenswood, where is a spring called from the famous Ponce de Leon."

This brings us to one of the most curious passages in the booklet. The author writes: "In 1868 Mr. H. H. Williams, an English florist, bought and later developed a beautiful grove on the Fountain of Youth grounds which he called Paradise Groves and Rose Gardens. . . . Mr. Williams discouraged the visitors who came to drink from the little spring flowing in his grove, and to listen to tales of Ponce de Leon told by the local hack drivers. He finally built a wooden fence around his property, after which the drivers resorted to amusing devices to provide a place to tell the story of Ponce de Leon." This she credits to "Fountain of Youth Library," and except for the bare fact that Mr. Williams bought and developed the place it is sheer fiction. "In 1874, however," she continues, "the spring on Mr. Williams' property was again open to visitors, for Florence Fenimore Woolson, niece of James Fenimore Cooper, described her walk there, and told of drinking from a spring half enclosed by a coquina curb." For this she refers to "Harpers Magazine," Vol. L., p. 176, Dec. 1874. "The Ancient City."

Miss Woolson's "The Ancient City," contained in the December 1874 and January 1875 numbers, relates the rambles of a group of winter visitors about St. Augustine. The visit to the Williams place is in the January number, pages 165-67. On this occasion when one member of the group asks where others have gone, the reply is: "They have all gone out to the Rose Garden by moonlight," "Suppose we stroll out that way to join them," suggested another. This moonlight stroll to the Williams place is the basis for the statement that Miss Woolson "described her walk there and told of drinking from the spring, half inclosed by a coquina curb."

The way was through the City Gates, past the cemetery and along the Shell Road. "Passing through the odd little wicket," wrote Miss Woolson, "we found ourselves in a green lane bordered at the far end with cedars. Here, down on the North River, was the Rose Garden, now with its silent house fast asleep in the moonlight." In what follows nothing is said about a

spring or to suggest the existence of a spring. We need not quote the text to show this, for it will be amply proved by the inferences to be drawn from another incident related by Miss Woolson herself a few pages further on in this same magazine chapter, and now to be read:

"The pleasant days passed," she writes, and one morning "one of the group proposed a walk to the Ponce de Leon spring. . . . Away we went through the town, across the Maria Sanchez Creek, under the tree arches and out on the broad causeway beyond. . . . Beyond the river the road led through the deep sand of Florida . . . turning to the right we passed through a little hamak. Presently we came out upon the barren. . . . At last we came to the place, and filed in through a broken down fence. We found a deserted house, an overgrown field, a gully, a pool, and an old curb of coquina surrounding the magic spring."

" 'The Fountain of Youth,' declaimed John, ladling out the water. 'Who will drink? Centuries ago the Indians of Cuba came to these shores to seek the waters of immortality, and as they never returned they are supposed to be still here somewhere enjoying a continued cherubic existence. . . . Father Martyn affirms that there is a spring here the water whereof being drunk straightway maketh the old young again. Ladies and Gentlemen: the original and only Ponce de Leon Spring! Who will drink?'

"We all drank and then there was a great silence.

" 'Well,' said the poet, deliberately looking around from his seat on the curb, 'take it all together, that shanty, those bushes, the pigsty, the hopeless sandy field, the oozing pool, and this horribly tepid water, drawn from, to say the least, a dubious source—a very dubious source—it's all in all about the ugliest place we ever saw!'

"There was a general shout.

" 'We have suspected it in our hearts all winter,' said the other young lady, 'but not one of us dared put the thought into words, as it was our only walk.' "

One can but marvel that a scientific mind which had achieved the task of a hydrographic survey extending back over a stretch of 420 years, and "by a careful check of what the tides and currents have done to this coast over this great period of time" was able to chart the entrance bar, the channels and sandbanks, the mud marshes and wooded points of the St. Augustine harbor of

1513—that such a mind should become so obfuscated as to lose itself here on dry land in the St. Augustine of 1874, should fail to distinguish the Whitney Ravenswood from the Williams Rose Garden, and should confuse the sulphur spring here on the west side of the San Sebastian river with the Williams well on Hospital Creek miles away.

The wonder is increased when we consider that Miss Woolson so clearly describes the separate entities and different locations of the two places, the diverse routes to them, the different hours of the visits, the places themselves and their surroundings and what occurred on each visit. And to all this must be added the pictures she leaves in the mind of the reader—the Rose Garden with its house fast asleep in the moonlight (a pretty conceit), in contrast with the hopeless sandy field at the Ravenswood sulphur spring, the shanty and the pigsty, the oozing pool and the horribly tepid water. It seems incredible that our author, reading Miss Woolson's sketch, should have got so far off her bearings, and have made such a lamentable mix-up of the waters of St. Augustine's two Fountains of Youth—a nauseous draught that would have disgusted Ponce de Leon and dismayed Aleida.

THE NAME SANTATAN.

Our author tells us that "It was Herrera who also supplied us with the name of the fountain, which he said was called Santatan." For this she refers to Herrera, Dec. 3, Book 1, Chap. 14. This in translation is a summing-up of the later life of Juan Ponce de Leon, the brief roll of the events of his career which gave him fame—the seeking for new lands and gold mines and Indian slaves to work them, the search for the wonder-working fountain, the discovery of Florida, the second voyage of 1521 to assume possession, the resistant natives, the fatal arrow wound, and the withdrawal to Cuba where he "ended his days," and his heirs succeeded to his honors and his wealth. Here compact in this brief recital Herrera has left us a little homily on the hollowness of human aspiration, the futility of high endeavor, the fleeting brevity of life.

But in the translation nothing is said of the fountain's name. For this we must look to the original Spanish text. Even there it is contained only in a cipher, concealed in which it has eluded discovery by the most erudite scholars. But now that we know

it to be there and know what it is, the name may readily be found. It is discovered lurking as a cryptogram in the phrase: "*i anduvo buscando aquella Fuente Santa, tan nombrada entre los Indios.*"

As here printed a comma divides the name into two parts. This may be accounted for by the working theory that Herrera, who had an appreciation of the eternal fitness of things, thought to perpetuate the air of mystery attaching to the fountain by investing the name with mystery as well; and by the simple artifice of an out-of-place punctuation point to conceal it as a cryptogram.

The comma, which is found in the first (1601) edition, has been carried through subsequent printings, and Herrera's ingenious device has baffled his readers for centuries. English translations have rendered the text variously but all of them substantially thus:

i anduvo buscando aquella Fuente Santa, tan nombrada
and went seeking that fountain healing so renowned
entre los Indios.
among the Indians.

"Fuente Santa," then, is the healing or restorative fountain whose waters accomplish the supreme triumph of healing by restoration of the vigor of youth to the aged. Those who consult the original text and those who rely on a translation would have continued to accept this version, had not the discerning insight and inspired interpretation of a cryptogrammatist detected the cipher and its hidden meaning. But now that "*Santa, tan*" is shown to be a cryptogram, we have only to take out the cunningly delusive comma and "*Santatan*" leaps out the name it actually is. The corrected translation now reads: "and went searching for that fountain named Santatan by the Indians."

It may be long before this historico-crypto-philological discovery shall find general acceptance—the Baconian-Shakespearian ciphers are not yet universally received—but the discovery has at the least contributed a new and musical catch-word to the patter of the guides at Hospital Creek, who show the tourists the place where Ponce de Leon first set foot on land, as their brothers of the ilk at the temple of ancient Kuofa show the pilgrims the precise spot where the prophet Jonah was cast up on land out of the belly of the whale.

Corria el nombre de Hernando Cortès, i su fama andaba mui reputada, lo qual levantò el animo à muchos de los mas antiguos, i mas principales Capitanes de las Indias, para emprender cosas señaladas; porque siendo del tiempo de Hernando Cortès, no se tenian en menos. Fue vno de estos el Adelantado Juan Ponce de Leon, que desde el Año de doce, que descubrió la Florida, i anduvo buscando aquella Fuente Santa, tan nombrada entre los Indios, i el Rio, cuyas Aguas remocaban los Viejos: i desde que le maltrataron los Caribes de la Isla de Guadalupe, se estuvo retirado. Ahora determinò de armar en la Isla de San Juan de Puerto-Rico, adonde tenia su Casa, dos Navios, en que gastò mucha parte de su Hacienda; fuè con ellos à la Florida, que aun se tenia por Isla, para certificarse de camino, si era Tierra-Firme, como lo dice en sus Cartas, que escribió en este Año al Emperador, al Cardenal Adriano, Governador de estos Reinos, en aquella saçon, i al Secretario Samano. Y llegado à tomar Tierra en la Florida, haviendo pasado muchos trabajos en la Navegacion, los Indios le salieron à resistir, i peleando con èl porfiadamente, le mataron alguna Gente, i herido en vn muslo, con la que le quedaba, se bolvió à Cuba, adonde acabò sus dias, i el Rei, por contemplacion de sus servicios, diò el Adelantamiento, i las demás Mercedes que tenia, à Luis Ponce de Leon, su Hijo.

Photostat copy of Herrera, Dec. III, Book I, Chap. XIV, in which the author of the booklet says is given the name of the fountain.

SOME ILLUSTRATIONS.

Among the illustrations in the booklet is one entitled "Menendez's First Mass." This may have been the basis of the *Times-Union* reviewer's still more astonishing statement, "where Menendez, the founder of St. Augustine, said his first Mass." There is a view entitled "Casa Blanca, San Juan, Puerto Rico, built for Ponce de Leon, 1521-1523." The house was built in 1525, four years after the death of Ponce in 1521. (See U. S. Govt. Register of Porto Rico, p. 122). Another illustration is of the "Don Toledo House," which is the Whitney's "oldest house in the United States," antedating by many years as a hoax the St. Augustine Historical Society "oldest house in the United States." Another view is entitled "Slave Market on the Plaza." A diagram map purports to show where Ponce de Leon landed on the site of the Fountain of Youth Park, and designates as "Points of Interest": "Old Huguenot Cemetery," "Oldest School House," "Post Office, formerly Spanish Governor's Mansion," "Old Slave Market," "State Arsenal, formerly Franciscan Monastery," "Fountain of Youth."

It may be conceded that Dr. Corse believes in these things, otherwise she would not endorse them by including them in this history which bears her name on the title page. Her own credulity however does not give sufficient sanction for her inclusion of them in this work which professes to be truthful as to history. Intelligent residents of St. Augustine know them all to be hoaxes. Perhaps the oldest and certainly the most vulgar of the lot is that of the "Old Huguenot Cemetery," to which she gives first place in her list. Dr. Andrew Anderson, St. Augustine's most beloved citizen, told the truth about this in his Armistice Day Address of 1921: "In those days before the Civil War I never heard of the existence of a burning spring, nor of an oldest house, nor of a slave market, nor of a Huguenot Cemetery. . . . The cemetery just outside the City Gates was deeded to the trustees of the Presbyterian Church, of whom my father was one, by the Rev. T. Alexander in 1832, for the use of the Protestants of the City." From 1832 until 1887, when interments were discontinued, this was the only Protestant Cemetery here. To it for more than fifty years the people of St. Augustine brought their dead.

One might think that a decent respect for the resting places of the dead and consideration for the sensibilities of the living would restrain from profanation of the spot by applying to it the negro drivers' hoax title which is their stock in trade.

WHAT THE EXAMINATION HAS SHOWN.

Our examination has shown that "The Fountain of Youth" booklet is not the product of careful research the *Times-Union* reviewer pronounced it to be. Investigation has disclosed inaccuracy and recklessness of statement, source citations manipulated to suppress evidence and lead to false deductions, substitution of fiction for recorded fact, confusion of localities so gross as to demand explanation, and an interpretation of Herrera's text so fantastic as to be explained only by some hypothesis not less bizarre. The work exhibits a lack of the sense of responsibility which must control the historian and constrain him to impart to his readers only what his research may reveal to be the facts of history. The thesis which the monograph was to prove—that Ponce de Leon on his voyage of discovery first landed at the site of St. Augustine, has not been established. The weird monologues of Luella Day McConnell, which gave the hearer the uncanny feeling that he was listening to the maunderings of a disordered brain, are not shown to have been recitals of history. The crucial point of the thesis we have seen to be a travesty of historical truth.

One who seeks information as to Ponce de Leon's landing place will find nothing authentic concerning it here; and though the naive observation in an early page, "Historians often find it necessary to consult many authorities before coming to a conclusion upon a point of ancient history," appears to be intended for readers of school age, "The Fountain of Youth" in the hands of the young would misinform and mislead. The practical business promoting usefulness of the work will be found in its effect upon the sightseers at Hospital Creek, who will believe that they find in its pages confirmation of what has been told them there.

THE HERRERA TEXT.

DECADA I, LIBRO IX, CAP. X.

On the opposite page is reproduced from a photostat of the original, the passage in the Herrera 1601 edition recording the landing of Ponce de Leon in Florida. The expedition sailed from San German, Porto Rico, March 3rd, 1513, and on March 14th reached Guanahani, the island which was the first land discovered by Columbus, and which he renamed San Salvador. The text reads:

"They set out from here [San Salvador], running northwest, and on Sunday the 27th, which was the day of the Festival of the Resurrection, which commonly they call 'of Flowers', they saw an island and did not examine it, and Monday the 28th they ran fifteen leagues by the same direction, and Wednesday they proceeded in the same way, and afterward with bad weather until the 2nd of April, running to west-northwest, the water lessening to nine fathoms, at one league from land, which was in thirty degrees and eight minutes, they ran along the length of coast, seeking harbor, and at night they anchored near the land, in eight fathoms of water. And thinking that this land was an island, they named it La Florida, because it had a very pretty view of many and cool woodlands, and it was level and uniform: and because moreover they discovered it in the time of the Flowery Festival [Pascua Florida] Juan Ponce wished to conform in the name with the two facts. He went on land to take information and possession.

"On Friday, the 8th, they made sail; they ran in the same direction, and Saturday they sailed to the south a quarter by southeast; and sailing by the same rhumb up to the 20th of April they discovered some huts of Indians, where they anchored." (*L. D. Scisco Translation.*)

On Friday the 8th they ran "in the same direction." The same direction can only mean the direction last previously mentioned i. e., the west-northwest of April 2nd. This shows that from April 2nd up to the time of turning south on April 9th the sailing course had been continuously in a northerly direction from $30^{\circ} 8'$. However far "they ran along the length of coast", it was in a direction northerly from latitude $30^{\circ} 8'$.

los Lucayos. Esta isla Guanahani fue la primera que descubrió el Almirante don Christoual Colon, y a donde en su primer viaje salió a tierra, y la llamó San Saluador. Partieron de aquí corriendo por el Norueste, y Domingo a veinte y siete, que era día de Pasqua de Resurecion, que comunmente dicen de Flores, vieron una isla, y no la reconocieron, y el Lunes a veinte y ocho corrieron quinze leguas por la misma via, y el Miercoles anduieron de la misma manera, y despues con mal tiempo hasta dos de Abril, cortiendo a Lucienorueste, yendo disminuyendo el agua hasta nueue braças, a una legua de tierra, que estava en treynta grados y ocho minutos, corrieron por luego de costa, buscando puerto, y la noche surgieron cerca de tierra, a ocho braças de agua. Y pensando que esta tierra era isla, la llamaron la Florida, porque tenia muy linda vista de muchas y frescas arboledas, y era llana, y pareja: y porque tambien la descubrieron en tiempo de Pasqua Florida, se quiso Iuan Ponce có formar en el nombre, con estas dos razones. Salio a tierra a tomar lengua, y posesion. Viernes a ocho hizieron vela, corrieron por la misma via: y Sabado naugaron al Sur, quarta al Sueste: y naugando por el mismo Rembo, hasta los veynte de Abril, descubrieron unos Bohios de Indios, a donde surgieron: y el día siguiente, yendo

THE WAR DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL FINDING.

Supremely ridiculous as was the St. Augustine *Evening Record* editorial of August 19, 1932, quoted in part on page 13, it had the effect of deluding its readers into the belief that the War Department had promulgated an official decision that Ponce de Leon had landed at the site of St. Augustine. This belief still prevails. How groundless it is the record shows.

An Act of Congress of June 11, 1926, provided for "the study and investigation of battlefields in the United States for commemorative purposes." The provisions of the act are carried out by a Board of Officers, three in number, appointed by the Secretary of War and representing the Quartermaster General, the Chief of Engineers and the Historical Section of the Army War College. The plan of operation provides for having the historical studies made by the Historical Section. Colonel H. L. Landers, the member of the Board of Officers representing the Historical Section at the time Senator Fletcher's bill was to be considered, undertook the historical study pertaining to the project. Notwithstanding that there were no "military historic events in connection with the landing of Ponce de Leon," Colonel Landers held that these might be assumed and that they were of a nature to bring them within the scope of the Act of 1926 and so within the purview of the Board of Officers. In due course he prepared his official report which was submitted by the Board of Officers to the Secretary of War, and was by him incorporated in his annual report covering the subject. This report was submitted to the President on December 10, and was transmitted to the Congress on December 13 in a Presidential Message entitled "Study of Battlefields in the United States for Commemorative Purposes." (Senate Document No. 151, 72nd Congress, 2nd Session.) The section of the report relating to the tablet reads as follows:

Ponce de Leon's Landing in Florida:

Method of commemoration: Tablet.

Land required: None.

Estimated cost of commemoration: \$1,000.

Attitude of local community: The most appropriate place to erect a tablet commemorating this event is at St. Augustine. The tablet should be erected on ground now owned or to be acquired by the city of St. Augustine

This then is the only official report rendered by the War Department. In it is no allusion to the landing place of Ponce de Leon, no "governmental decree" that the landing was at St. Augustine. In response to an inquiry, Major C. C. Benson, Secretary of the Army War College Historical Section, advised the writer: "This part of the report was drafted by Colonel Landers. You will note that it does not specify the place where Ponce de Leon landed in Florida, but merely indicates the place (St. Augustine) that Colonel Landers selected as being most appropriate for the erection of a commemorative tablet."

And from another official source, also in response to an inquiry, is the further confirmation: "The statement in Senate Document No. 151, 72nd Congress, 2nd Session, is the report of the Secretary of War to Congress on the subject in question. This report is the result of the study made by a Board of Officers advisory to the Secretary of War and constitutes the only 'official finding' of the War Department."

This is the record of the War Department. It is also the record of Colonel Landers as a member of the Board of Officers and of the Historical Section of the War College, and as the one who wrote the report. It is his only record that calls for attention by a careful historian. The irrelevant and prolonged investigation to determine the location of the landing place had ended in futility. Read collectively the four conclusions of the letter to Senator Fletcher left the landing location still in the realm of conjecture and Ponce de Leon still at sea.

But while Colonel Landers failed in his quest, another succeeded. Dr. Corse pursued a simpler and more summary method of research. She wrote her own account of the event; laid the scene at the site of St. Augustine, and brought Ponce de Leon to land on Hospital Creek, within the bounds of what is now a showman's park, and at the spot where a mendacious tablet proclaims with absolute finality: "He landed here."

